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MISSOURI STATE PARKS

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Missouri State Capitol CENTER OF STATE GOVERNMENT

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Dominating the skyline in all directions, Missouri's state Capitol is a monument to her citizens. The building rests upon a limestone bluff on the south bank of the Missouri River. It is 437 feet long and 300 feet wide at its center. The top of the dome towers 262 feet above the basement floor. The building, which covers three acres and has 500,000 square feet of floor space, is literally a museum of public art, remarkable not only for its quality and abundance, but as a faithful reflection of the themes, events and people of Missouri.

The present Capitol is the third to stand in Jefferson City. The first, built in 1826 when the seat of government moved to the city, measured 40 feet by 60 feet and served as home for Missouri's governors. Flames engulfed that building in 1837, but construction of a second and much larger Capitol had already started on a nearby hill. This classical Revival structure was enlarged in the late 1880s to accommodate a growing government, but it also burned on Feb. 5, 1911, in one of the most spectacular fires in Missouri's history. Despite the total loss of the building, many state records were saved through the heroic efforts of hundreds of volunteers, prisoners, legislators and public officials.

A few months later, in a special election held Aug. 1, 1911, Missourians approved the issuance of \$3.5 million in state bonds for a new Capitol. New York designers Egerton Swartwout and Evarts Tracy were selected to design the new building, which was officially dedicated on Oct. 6, 1924.

When the special property tax earmarked for the Capitol generated a \$1 million surplus, the attorney general ruled that the money had to be used on the building. It was decided to use the money to decorate the Capitol, and a five-person commission recruited some of the most notable artists of the day including Frank Brangwyn, N.C. Wyeth, James Earle Fraser and Alexander Stirling Calder. The result is a splendid collection of stained glass, murals, carvings and statuary portraying Missouri's history, legends and cultural achievements.

In 1935, the Missouri House of Representatives commissioned Missouri native Thomas Hart Benton to paint a mural on the four walls of the House Lounge, a large meeting room on the third floor in the Capitol's west wing. The mural at first sparked controversy among the legislators with its bold and vivid scenes of everyday Missouri life. Surviving attempts to whitewash it, Benton's "Social History of

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Missouri State Capitol

Missouri" is now a source of pride and a popular stop for visitors touring the Capitol.

Part of the original Capitol plans called for a ground-floor museum that showcased Missouri's cultural and natural history. Now operated by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri State Museum features exhibits, dioramas and changing displays. The east wing of the museum, originally named the Missouri Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall in 1919 to recognize Missourians who served during World War I, now serves as the state museum's History Hall. The Resources Museum, created in 1921 to display the products of the state's forests, fields and mines, today serves as the state museum's Resources Hall.

All four floors of Missouri's Capitol are open to the public. A 30-minute guided tour is the best way to experience the historic and decorative features of the building. A walk around the Capitol grounds highlights more of Missouri's history, including Karl Bitter's bronze relief of the signing of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty, which sits on the terrace overlooking the Missouri River.

Whether viewing the interior or exterior, the Missouri state Capitol provides visitors a rewarding glimpse of the cultural and natural legacy of our state.

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